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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 009759

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/AND AND DS/IP/WHA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/2015

TAGS: ASEC PTER PREL CO FARC GOV

SUBJECT: TWO TERRORIST ATTACKS IN BOGOTA IN TWO DAYS;

RESPONSIBILITY REMAINS UNCLEAR

REF: BOGOTA 9635

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood;  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) Bogota experienced two terrorist incidents in 48 hours. On the evening of October 10, a remote-controlled 50-kilogram explosive device hidden in a parked car was detonated in northern Bogota as Senator German Vargas Lleras's motorcade drove past. Vargas escaped unharmed, but nine Colombians were injured. More than four hundred other Colombians sustained property damage. On October 11, there was an unsuccessful mortar attack on Casa Narino, the Presidential Palace. Investigations are ongoing. The Colombian National Police (CNP) suspect that the two attacks are related and are the work of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). Senator Vargas believes that other illegal groups may be involved in the attack on his life.

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ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF SENATOR VARGAS  
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12. (SBU) At approximately 10:15 pm on October 10, a car bomb exploded as Senator German Vargas Lleras's three-car motorcade passed through the Carrera 9 and Calle 71 area of northern Bogota. Vargas had just finished his weekly radio program "Hora 20" at the nearby Radio Caracol offices. Vargas, who was in the second car, escaped uninjured. The third car, which bore the brunt of the explosion, was completely destroyed. According to press reports, nine Colombians were injured in the blast. Embassy contacts confirm that two of the injured were CNP escorts assigned to protect Vargas. This is the second attempt on Vargas's life. In December 2002, Vargas lost three fingers on his left hand after opening a letter bomb.

13. (C) Preliminary investigations indicate that the explosion was caused by a command-detонated, shape-charge explosive device placed in a parked car along Vargas's expected route. Police said that the bomb was cone-shaped and contained 50 kilograms of anfo, a mixture of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil. The device likely was detonated by a person who observed Vargas's motorcade drive north on a one-way street away from Caracol's offices. The car used has been identified by the Administrative Security Department (DAS) as a red Chevrolet Corsa that was parked on the left side of Carrera 9 a few minutes before the truck exploded. DAS said that the car was sold to unidentified buyers on September 11.

14. (SBU) Members of the Embassy Regional Security Office were on the scene within an hour of the explosion. (Note: Many Embassy employees live 5-10 blocks north of the site of the attack and heard the explosion. End Note.) The CNP granted RSO access to the site and permitted examination of the remains of the car that contained the bomb. RSO staff said buildings within a two-block radius of the explosion suffered damage to windows, including the nearby Hotel Lugano, where nine Embassy temporary duty (TDY) personnel were housed. RSO accounted for all TDY personnel within the hour; none were injured. RSO noted that five of the nine TDY rooms had window damage and that none of the hotel windows were covered with mylar. RSO and Secret Service personnel at the Embassy noted that Vargas's car was armored but the other two cars in the motorcade were not. Embassy convened a meeting of the Emergency Action Committee on October 11 (see Ref).

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ATTACK ON CASA NARINO  
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15. (C) On the evening of October 12, one 120mm mortar round with tubes was launched at the grounds of Casa Narino, the Presidential Palace, from a small house in a residential neighborhood. It did not detonate and was later made safe. The back pressure caused by the launch caused the system set

to sequentially launch nine additional mortar rounds to fail. These munitions were labeled "FARC" and were similar to weapons known to be used by the FARC. An unidentified man and woman rented the house approximately four months ago, indicating that the failed attack was the product of some planning and preparation.

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GOC SUSPECTS THE FARC, BUT RESPONSIBILITY UNCLEAR  
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¶ 16. (C) The CNP suspects that both are attacks are related and the work of the FARC. The CNP stated that the type of bomb used against Vargas was consistent with the bombs used by the FARC in past attacks, including the 2002 El Nogal bombings. The CNP also said that the failed attack on the Presidential Palace was similar to the FARC's 2002 Inauguration Day attack against President Uribe.

¶ 17. (C) In an interview with El Tiempo printed on October 12, Vargas implied that "other illegal groups" not related to the FARC were responsible for his attempted assassination. He refused to provide details, but stated that an unnamed informant told him that the "mafia and some politicians" were planning an attack on his life about two weeks ago. According to Vargas, the police spoke to the informant but did not tell him the results of their investigations. Vargas is a strong Uribe supporter and is considered to be a presidential candidate who will follow Uribe's democratic security agenda if Uribe is not permitted to run for reelection. Vargas told the media that he does not think this is why he was attacked. He did predict, however, that this is the beginning of election season violence. He warned Colombians to "prepare for the worst."

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COMMENT: WAIT FOR THE EVIDENCE  
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¶ 18. (C) At this point, the two attacks seem unrelated, but no one is certain. In each case the type of equipment has led the Colombian police to focus their investigation on the FARC. The attack against Casa Narino fits the FARC modus operandi better. We caution readers not to move to conclusions about either attack before additional evidence is in. End Comment.

WOOD